

By Monte Noelke

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MERTZON — Rain falling in the Shortgrass Country as this is being written, puddles are forming right outside my window. The showers have been heavy enough at times this morning to blot out the Boss's house, which is less than two miles away. And the mid-day weather report indicates that large scope of ranchland has finally received some relief from the drouth.

I don't know what happened to make it rain in July. Evidently the seasons have changed. Back in the old days, April and May were the rainy months. In those times, rivers and creeks would run; late lambs and calves of all ages would bloom. Had it not been for that other bad depression, life would have been as carefree as a woodcutter's song.

But for some reason the weather pattern has changed. To be exact the depression has been renewed and more drouths occur every year.

Under the present conditions the sharpest rancher out here considers he's practicing long range planning when he looks ahead 30 minutes to six hours. The only ones who know how much stock to run are those wise enough to work for the government. Year ago, respected economists concluded that most of us were always either out of grass and money, or so short on both items that normal graphing procedures wouldn't record our catastrophes.

The most acceptable theory on how to manage Shortgrass County grassland was drawn up by the only son of a deceased diamond collector. This chap based his conclusions on the amount of land that was taken out by what he called "basic improvements."

He wrote, in effect, that in order to determine the carrying capacity of a ranch, the first step was to find out how much land around headquarters was removed from production. He maintained that swimming pools, hothouses, golf courses, polo fields, fishing lakes and croquet courts took up much more space than the ordinary rancher realized.

He went on to formulate an equation which he hoped would give his theory scientific basis. It worked like this:

By taking the distance to and from the feed store and multiplying this by 640, the annual tax write-off from the agricultural pursuits can be determined. Then, using the write-off as a base figure, the carrying capacity of pastureland can be found by a few steps of simple comparative calculus.

Unfortunately, the fellow paused at this point and quit ranching to raise orchids near Hollywood, Calif. His theory never received a practical test. I did hear that he had a lot more fun out west than he did here, but that's beside the point.

Now that we're getting rain this late in the summer, I don't know what our future will be. But without benefit of council I can prove that regardless of when it rains in these parts, we're always ready for it.